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General and complete disarmament: implementation of the Convention on the Prohibition of the Development, Production, Stockpiling and Use of Chemical Weapons and on Their Destruction

Security Council
Seventy-second year

Letter dated 26 October 2017 from the Permanent Representative of the Russian Federation to the United Nations addressed to the Secretary-General

I have the honour to transmit herewith a statement by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Russian Federation concerning attempts to distort the Russian position in the Security Council vote on the draft resolution on extending the mandate of the Organisation for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons-United Nations Joint Investigative Mechanism to investigate cases of possible use of chemical weapons in the Syrian Arab Republic (see annex).

I should be grateful if you would have the present letter and its annex circulated as an official document of the General Assembly, under item 99 (l) of the agenda, and of the Security Council.

(*Signed*) V. **Nebenzia**

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Annex to the letter dated 26 October 2017 from the Permanent Representative of the Russian Federation to the United Nations addressed to the Secretary-General

Statement by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Russian Federation concerning the attempts to distort the Russian position in the Security Council vote on the draft resolution on extending the mandate of the Joint Investigative Mechanism

The Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Russian Federation expected that, immediately after the draft resolution of the United States of America on extending the mandate of the Organisation for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons (OPCW)-United Nations Joint Investigative Mechanism (JIM) was vetoed, on 24 October, sharp attacks would be made on us by representatives of a number of Western countries. The level of brazenness was off the scale. We are not concerned about the attitude towards their own reputations of those who once again swooped in to mischaracterize our approach. Nevertheless they should be reminded about what is admissible in international affairs, and what should be avoided.

The Press Secretary of the White House, for example, went so far as to say that Moscow is endorsing "the Assad regime's use of chemical weapons against innocent women and children". The Permanent Representative of the United States of America to the United Nations did not hold back either, alleging that the Russian Federation "once again sides with the dictators and terrorists who use these weapons".

We call on our American colleagues to observe at least a minimum of decorum. In civilized international relations it is not acceptable to distort an opponent's position so crudely, simply in order to expose the opponent afterwards and cast the opponent in an unfavourable light. The White House and the State Department cannot fail to understand that what we were opposing was not an extension of the mandate of JIM, but the adoption of a hasty decision on the matter, without taking into account the anticipated report on the work of JIM over the past year, about which little is known as yet. In our view it would be unprofessional and irresponsible to follow the lead of the United States of America and mindlessly rubber stamp a far-reaching decision without even reviewing the situation. Indeed, such a review must be carried out, and in depth, for the following reasons:

The use of sarin in Syrian Khan Shaykhun on 4 April 2017 and the subsequent course of events demonstrated very serious systemic problems in the work of the OPCW Fact-Finding Mission and JIM. This includes selective fulfilment of mandates, unpreparedness or inability to use the full range of investigation methods envisaged in the Chemical Weapons Convention, and outright refusal to conduct an investigation at the site of the incident, and even, as recently came to light, an attempt — involving the Fact-Finding Mission — to mislead the international community regarding the possibilities of safe access to Khan Shaykhun. It is clear that if we really want to identify the culprits in the use of chemical weapons, these basic deficits must be quickly remedied. But it seems that the current state of affairs is entirely satisfactory for Western colleagues. Indeed, they are desperately trying to leave everything as it is. And that is because their goal is not to establish the truth, but to use high-profile international structures to increase pressure on Damascus.

Back in April, when the Russian Federation was urging the immediate dispatch of inspectors to Khan Shaykhun and the Sha'irat airbase, where sarin used in Khan Shaykhun was allegedly stored, these countries blocked the draft decisions we proposed in the Security Council and in the OPCW Executive Council. There are

strong grounds to believe that these same countries subsequently put heavy pressure on the Fact-Finding Mission and JIM for their representatives not to go to those sites in the Syrian territory under any circumstances. They were able to insist on this because, in violation of international rules and norms, two British citizens head the Fact-Finding Mission.

The national reports of the United Kingdom, France and Turkey, which reached an unquestioned conclusion that the Syrian air force bears responsibility for the use of sarin in Khan Shaykun, constituted another form of pressure on the investigative structures and an attempt to "indoctrinate" them. The fact that the special services of these States had no problem taking samples at the site of the incident demonstrates how free and easy their operatives feel in territories controlled by the most radical Jihadist groups. However, these countries did not want to assist the representatives of the Fact-Finding Mission in visiting the site of the incident. Our request to share details of the national investigation was met by the British, for example, by a categorical refusal.

All this too is no accident. What this amounts to is a consistent course, which raises even bigger questions, taken by those who are now trying to attach labels to us. It is noteworthy that all attempts by the Russian Federation over the last few years to elicit a reaction from the Security Council to the crimes of terrorists using chemical weapons have been aggressively blocked every time by the Western "troika". This borders on open shielding of terrorists.